

THE ROLE OF AN AUTHENTIC CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY FOR RURAL SCHOOLS AND THE PROFESSIONAL SATISFACTION OF RURAL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Teachers in rural schools are often caught in a binary between a curriculum and 'official' pedagogies that value cosmopolitan ways of being and their own situated concerns for the interests of the students they teach and the communities in which they live. In this paper I draw on the example of two categories of (history) teachers, those who locate their practice in place and those who value a more bureaucratic approach to their work, in order to explore the question of an authentic rural curriculum (and pedagogy). The paper draws upon a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with newly appointed teachers in rural school, experienced rural teachers and experts with systemic responsibilities or experience related to quality education in general. On a number of key issues of curriculum and pedagogy the data gathered grouped around two distinct views; that rural schools are different and that teachers need to be prepared for this difference and recognize it in their curriculum, or that all schools are the same regardless of location and what matters is the quality of the teaching. As a result of this study I suggest that teachers who reinterpret the curriculum and situate their pedagogy in the places they work are better placed to meet the educational needs of their students and their own professional goals.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on an aspect of a larger project exploring the relationship between place, rural education, social justice and teachers' professional identity, namely the way teachers relate to the curriculum and the pedagogy they employ. Within the context of secondary history I explore the idea of a place-conscious curriculum and its relationship to the formal curriculum. Following Gruenewald's idea of a critical pedagogy of place (2003a) and the importance of place-conscious education (2003b), this project recognizes that education has become increasingly placeless and instead focused upon normalization in the form of standardized curriculum and assessment, teaching standards and even official models of quality pedagogy. The narrowing of education and the accountability regimes that accompany these developments undermines teachers' self-efficacy and professional commitment and subsequently limits professional knowledge. This narrowing of professionalism redefines teachers' professional identity to that of an accountable actor who regulates her or his behaviour and seeks validation against external criteria (Ball, 2003). I argue that this new self regulating regime, that Ball labels performativity (2003), impacts in particular ways in rural settings by transforming the curriculum away from recognizing rural knowledges and separating teachers from rural places.

The current education climate in Australia sees significant attention on issues of a standard national curriculum and assessment regimes and a separate focus on the importance of teacher quality. While combined in a concern for equity (MCEETYA, 2008), the dual focus separates curriculum and pedagogy as distinct approaches to improving educational achievement. As Green and Letts (2007) point out, the concern for equity, particularly in rural regions, has often been used as justification for centralized state-based education systems. A similar rationale can be seen in relation to the Australian

Curriculum and national testing regimes (MCEETYA, 2008) and are an important, albeit erroneous, justification for standardized assessment regimes (Apple, 2006). These justifications take on significant weight against a context of the comparatively poor educational achievement of many rural areas compared to many metropolitan areas (Thomson, 2011). Coupled with the growing focus on teacher quality and the idea that what the teacher does is the single most important in-school factor in improving educational achievement (Hattie, 2003, 2009) many states have implemented models of effective pedagogy, for example the NSW Quality Teaching Model (NSW DET, 2003). This separation of curriculum and pedagogy works against place-conscious teaching in that it places knowledge on one pedestal and teaching upon another while suggesting that knowledge is fixed and uncontestable and teaching a set of skills that can be enacted regardless of context. Furthermore this separation removes any need for an informed and responsive professional educator who seeks to understand their students and the places they come from, and who plans lessons related to their particular circumstances, and as such undermines teachers' self-efficacy.

Pinar (2005) argues that this separation results in a shallow focus on teaching and learning as opposed to deep and meaningful study; the curriculum becomes a series of things to remember and recite at a given time and pedagogy the facilitation of this curriculum form. Such an approach works in a neoliberal and neoconservative construction of schooling and equity as it is through a common curriculum and common testing that student achievement can be compared and measured (Apple, 2006). As Reid (2011) points out, this shift to a national scale is at the expense of teaching with, and for, the 'particularities of the place[s] where they [teachers and students] are teaching, learning and living' (2011, p.22). This is a new construction of the curriculum away from how the 'curriculum' used to be understood, as 'embracing situated enactments of teaching and learning and assessment in the classroom' (Yates, 2009, p.18), towards an impersonal and placeless curriculum in which the key curriculum question of 'what knowledge is of most worth?' has been definitively answered and how to teach it codified and packaged.

Definitively answering what knowledge matters and the form of its teaching and assessment is a fundamental matter of culture and power (Apple, 2006). Coming from a rural perspective the values of the Australian Curriculum and education policy (MCEETYA, 2008) can be seen as cosmopolitan in that they represents a form of worldliness, future orientation and the primacy of economic development (Corbett, 2010; Popkewitz, 2008) as fundamental and uncontestable goals. Given that cultural power in Australia is exercised by metropolitan areas (Brett, 2011) and that this has justified the control of rural areas (Green & Letts, 2007), it is not surprising that the recognition of situated knowledges and the need to be place-conscious has slipped from the educational lexicon. This evolving cosmopolitan character has a long history in Australia (McLeod, 2012) and has resulted in a situation where rural schools mirror those in metropolitan areas with the ideal of the urban school being mythologised and rural teachers being forced to ignore their differences (Boylan et al., 1992). Indeed as Corbett (2010) notes, the cosmopolitan character of the new global, metropolitan, economy has effectively embedded its values in schooling, changing its character and marginalizing many rural areas.

Re-engaging with place and valuing rural places in education is not simply a matter of pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003a) as such a singular focus reinforces the problematic separation of curriculum and pedagogy discussed above. Instead I suggest that it involves returning to earlier views of curriculum as encompassing the broad educational experience (Pinar, 2012; Yates, 2009) and the 'nuanced complexity of educational experience' (Pinar, 2012, p. 42). In such a view, curriculum is subjective and social (Pinar, 2012), necessitates a responsiveness to places, and a re-articulation of the professionalism of teachers 'as 'students' interests and teachers' knowledge and judgement converge in determining, in any given situation, what knowledge is of most worth' (Pinar, 2012, p.22). Such a place-conscious *curriculum* builds upon Gruenewald's (2003a; 2003b) foundations of place-based education while also explicitly connecting them with matters of curriculum.

Within this approach I use the term 'place' in accordance with Gieryn (2000, p.465) who suggests that 'place is space filled up by people, practices, objects and representations'. In this manner, I use place to refer to the local as understood by each individual, student and teacher, and therefore understood as a multiplicity of places existing simultaneously, based on each individual's meaning making. When place is used in this way the erasure that cosmopolitanism enacts on meaning making becomes

apparent and as such a focus on place implies a critique of these approaches. Space on the other hand is seen here as the more abstract generalization of these places and is used on multiple scales from the immediate surrounds to broader regions. The idea that space is perceived, conceived and lived (Soja, 1996) is central to meaning making (of place) and place-conscious education. Thus the placeless characteristic of cosmopolitan forms of education allow popular stereotypes of the rural as distant, disadvantaged, difficult and fearful to inform policy and justify centralization and standardization in the name of quality and equity (Green & Letts, 2007). Such stereotypes also influence teachers' decisions to accept positions in rural schools and also in relation to retention (Roberts, 2008), and I argue the way they relate to students and the curriculum they implement in their classrooms. Importantly, not all stereotypes of the rural are negative, as the notion of the rural idyll is arguably as powerful as that of 'wake in fright', however this idyll implies equally limiting possibilities as this attitude still belies that the rural has not kept up socially with the modern and instead values a golden era of yesteryear (Brett, 2011).

In this respect, an authentic place-conscious curriculum is one that is conscious of place, recognizes the value inherent in all places, and does not artificially separate curriculum and pedagogy. By authenticity I evoke Hayes et al's (2006) notion of authentic learning as one that aligns what is taught with how it is taught and who it is taught to in meaningful educational activities. Such an authenticity has four main characteristics: firstly, learning is focused on the construction of knowledge; secondly, it uses disciplined (as in in depth and structured) inquiry; thirdly, it has value beyond the classroom; and finally, it has explicit social outcomes such as valuing non-dominant forms of knowledge (Hayes et al, 2006). Notably there is a significant overlap here with Gruenewalds (2003a) critical pedagogy of place as arguably engaging with and through place is a central characteristic of authentic learning. Furthermore such an active engagement requires the deliberate intellectual labour of teachers in response to, and in conversation with, their place, is rooted in a form of professionalism that requires an intellectual identity. It actively works against the constrictions of performativity (Ball, 2003) and the damage this does to teachers' self-efficacy.

METHOD

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted for this project: eighteen with current teachers and eight with educators working in educational support roles or administration. The interviews were conducted within a study of rural teaching that focused on the experiences of history teachers and explored the idea of place in teaching. The interviews revolved around the central ideas of:

- understanding place,
- recognising situated knowledge,
- using situated knowledge,
- negotiating the relationship with standards, pedagogy models and the curriculum,
- linking situated knowledge with standards, pedagogy models and the curriculum, and
- the messages contained in standards, pedagogy models and the curriculum.

The eighteen practicing teachers were recruited through open invitation in the form of an email to non-metropolitan members of the History Teachers Association of New South Wales. As such, the eighteen practicing teachers identify as history teachers and it was in the context of history teaching that the interviews were conducted. While the invitation to participate was explicitly aimed at teachers in their first three years of teaching, a significant number of experienced teachers also expressed an interest in participating. Consequently two categories of participants emerged: ten new teachers (NST) in the first three years of their appointment and eight experienced teachers (EXP), either Heads of Departments or classroom teachers with more than six years experience, most with over fifteen. These 'experienced teachers' as I have called them all had similar characteristics in that they have chosen to stay in rural areas and consequently identify both as *rural* teachers and as *history* teachers. Their interest in taking part suggests their commitment to rural areas and interest in helping prepare teachers for these settings. While the participation of the new teachers also suggests their interests in helping prepare future teachers for what they have already experienced, they differ from the more experienced teachers in that they don't self identify as rural teachers in the same way. I will explore these differences further later in this paper.

In addition to the eighteen practicing teachers, a number of 'experts' (XPT) working in various support roles and educational administration were approached to participate in this study. These participants were individually identified, or nominated by their organization, due to their support of history teachers, having a personal background of rural teaching, or supporting teaching generally. The group comprised academic experts, History curriculum officials, senior bureaucrats or leaders of professional associations. While the same broad questions were covered, this later category often discussed rural teaching in the broad context of views of effective teaching and as such provided valuable insights into how the rural is perceived by those influencing educational decision-making at the present moment.

Semi-structured interviews were adopted in order to avoid the division objective interviews put between the researcher and subject (Oakley, 1981) and to allow greater depth and the development of rich narratives (Minichiello, Aroni et al., 1990). Such an approach is necessary in rural research as it allows the foregrounding of rural meanings (Howley, Theobald & Howley, 2005) by valuing subjectivity and particularity and in turn limits the erasure of rural meanings by standardized objective approaches (Roberts & Green, 2012). This approach allowed the researcher to share personal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) of rural places and rural teaching to bring both credibility and encourage the subjects to open up about their experiences of place. Importantly, the approach also allows the researcher's familiarity with the rural context and subject area to be used in interpreting the participants' responses in an open and transparent manner.

Writing and researching place inevitably involves a range of subjectivities and is in many ways an act of autoethnography (Jones, 2005) as the conclusions and interpretations are informed by the researcher's own experience of place. Similarly, participants' explanations are coloured by their unique experience and perspective of their particular places and through their biographies in place. However, it is this very grounding in each individual's experience that gives the research validity as the very ideas of situatedness and place are relational to individuals' experiences, and it is the celebration of this difference which is a significant concept in this study. This methodological approach need not be at the expense of rigour and objectivity, instead it opens up new possibilities for understanding (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones, 2005). That participants will inevitably root their experiences within their personal narratives further advances the expansive view of curriculum employed in this study, as according to Pinar (2012) teachers' biographies impact on the curriculum they enact. With this in mind, it is this very situated enactment and its relationship to biography, especially as many teachers' understandings are formed around metropolitan (cosmopolitan) forms of schooling and knowledge that is an important window through which to understand the mediating influence of place on self-efficacy.

The interviews were conducted either in the subjects location in a venue of their choice, via Skype video calling or Skype audio only calling (depending on the participants available technology), with all interviews being recorded for subsequent transcription. There was no pattern to the medium used, in that some of the more remotely located teachers were interviewed in person and some were interviewed over Skype. Interestingly there was no discernable difference in the length, depth or quality of the interviews between the three mediums, suggesting that remote interviewing using either audio only calling or video calling are effective means of researching with rural and remote teachers.

As the interviews were semi-structured (Fontana & Frey, 2000) and in-depth (Minichiello, Aroni et al., 1990), participants were able to lead the direction of interviews and to explore in their own way how they situate their practice and construct knowledge in place. There was a basic framework of questions common to each interview, with the researcher ensuring that all questions were covered throughout the interview. However each interview began, after initial introductions, and ended with the same question in order to obtain a comparative understanding of perspectives on quality teaching. Throughout this paper, codes and pseudonyms are used for the participants, their role and location in order to maintain the confidentiality of all involved.

DISCUSSION

Self-selection as evidence?

In this study it was evident that engaging teachers in their first few years of their career in research was significantly more difficult than engaging experienced teachers. The experience of recruiting participants for this project anecdotally suggests that many new teachers perceive a deficiency in their practice in rural schools, and that experienced teachers also perceive the need to help these teachers adjust to their new position. In the recruitment period for this project, and its precursor¹, the number of initial expressions of interest from new teachers was only about one quarter of that from experienced teachers, and then a majority of these choose not to participate. In choosing not to participate they mentioned in conversation issues such as: they don't quite know what they are doing yet, don't feel they are really meeting their students' needs, or don't think they are yet able (so hopeful) to make the curriculum relevant to their students. While of course this would be appropriate evidence in support of the hypothesis that when teachers are not conscious of place in their pedagogy it manifests in dissatisfaction, it would be ethically inappropriate to advocate participation on these grounds. This raises a number of important questions and highlights an important area of future research, for if participants are opting out of telling their stories their struggles with place are not being told and these struggles conceivably have a strong connection to their retention and professional satisfaction. Conversely the new teachers who did accept the invitation all have strong views, both positive and negative, about the places they teach in and their students. Consequently it could be argued that a place-consciousness of either positive or negative affect equates with greater self-efficacy in relation to knowledge of teaching.

Furthermore, in the recruitment for this project, and its precursor, a significant number of experienced teachers responded positively to being involved. These experienced teachers saw some importance in helping new teachers in rural schools by either recalling their personal experiences of being a new teacher or having worked with other new teachers and recognising the issues of adjustment they face. While half the new teachers in this study indicated they would not seek to remain in rural schools², the other half valued their experiences and indicated they would stay, possibly skewing the data. Interestingly their reasons for staying, and those of some experienced teacher participants, related more to personal lifestyle choices, supporting Boylan's (2010) thesis in relation to tree-changers and rural staffing. However, participants citing lifestyle as a reason to remain in their rural school didn't always describe their practice in terms of what this research might call an authentic place-conscious curriculum, and were often highly critical of what they referred to as the 'state of education' today and the increased expectations they perceived teachers to be subject to. For these teachers the smaller class sizes, a perceived reduced workload, less parental demands, and less expectation to achieve (sic) were all seen as positives that allowed a better work-life balance, particularly when coupled with the open spaces, proximity to nature for recreation and housing affordability. In this context the privileging of lifestyle and criticism of the education reforms being explored in this study, professional standards, pedagogy models and centralised curriculum and assessment, can be seen as a retreat from the pressures of performing in neoliberal assessment regimes.

Experienced versus new teachers' reasons for participating.

The interviews suggested a subtle motivational difference for participation between the experienced and new teachers. The experienced teachers tended to suggest an interest in giving something back and helping prepare new teachers for rural areas. For them, comments like *'I've been doing this for a while'* (EXP4) or *'just hope what I've learnt can be of use'* (EXP1) were common. The motivation for participation was divided between having seen many teachers not succeed or having concerns, in

¹ An initial project based on a professional community of practice was attempted to be established as part of this larger project but was discarded due to a lack of participants.

² Two participants in the new teacher category did indeed leave their position at the end of the year.

their opinion, for the quality of new teachers. Thus comments like *'too many teachers turn up here and get freaked, the more they know before they come the better for everyone'* (EXP3) or *'all they teach at Uni is QT (NSW Quality Teaching Model, 2003), so they don't really know how to teach children when they arrive'* (EXP 6) were equally common.

Building upon the quality theme, the new teachers universally suggested ideas in relation to the perceived deficiency of their pre-service preparation for teaching in rural schools, as evidenced by comments like *'I didn't learn anything about these places or teaching these kids at Uni'* (NST2) or *'yeah, whoo, what a culture shock. This place is insane. Where was that in the degree?'* (NST1). Consequently most of these new teachers seemed to reject research into effective teaching largely though their experience of a gap between their preparation and the reality of teaching, however, one in particular seemed to value research and saw how it did relate to their teaching context. Clearly there is a stark difference between *'well the QT (NSW Quality Teaching Model, 2003) model is pointless as it has nothing to do with teaching kids in places like this. It's ok for those nice city schools'* (NST7) and *'yeah, when I get stuck or can't figure out what's happening I'll go back to the model or what we were taught [in pre-service teacher training]'* (NST 10). Unfortunately the latter comment was much less common. Accounting for these stark differences is an important future research focus, as while it might be tempting to suggest a form of personal disposition, such a conclusion would be problematic as it would reinforce the stereotype of the born hero teacher and question the effectiveness of pre-service teacher training. Clearly preparation and training have developed a deep understanding of research and a cycle of thinking and reflection that informs NST 10's practice.

Two ways of being

The most significant finding to emerge in relation to the hypothesis of this paper is the emergence of two categories of (history) teachers, those who locate their practice in place and those who value a more bureaucratic approach to their work. Importantly these categories don't align with whether participants were new or experienced teachers. Furthermore, the views of 'experts' were divided where they relate to descriptions of quality teaching, however, they have not been included in the categories of practice described here as they relate to opinions of practice rather than descriptions of actual practice. Another way of looking at these categories might be to suggest that those teachers who locate their practice in place are rejecting the identity accompanied by Ball's notion of performativity (2003), while those that tend to a more bureaucratic view embody such an identity.

Performativity, and indeed Australia's national goals of schooling (MCEETYA, 2008), reject any recognition of difference other than the 'established' categories of disadvantage; low SES, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and language (Roberts, 2008). Any other 'difference' is seen as irrelevant and to be mediated by the strong focus on equity and excellence as per achievement in a standardised cosmopolitan system. However, a recognition of the difference of places and their relationship to this form of cosmopolitan schooling is crucial to place-conscious education, and clearly something recognized by respondents in this study who had two distinct perspectives on rural schooling: that rural schools are different and that teachers need to be prepared for this difference and recognize it in their pedagogy and approach to the curriculum, or that all schools are the same regardless of location and what matters is the quality of the teaching.

The language used by newly appointed and experienced rural teachers in relation to these views revealed much about their apparent levels of satisfaction and the engagement of their students. Specifically those that recognized the 'rural difference' tended towards language of greater satisfaction suggested a more positive professional outlook and more positive student engagement than those who did not. For example one new teacher very quickly identified the challenges associated with her remote location:

of course we're totally isolated here, pretty much all inexperienced and it's hard to get teachers ... and the kids face lots of challenges, there are big literacy issues and getting to school for a whole week is pretty tough for most of them (NST 8),

but did so as an aside, saying *'we can't change that, we've just got to work with it'* (NST 8), before quickly moving to excitedly talking about what she is doing in her classroom and the great work her students are doing on a unit related to the local area: *'they're [sic] really got into that, it was so good to*

see and work they produced was fantastic, well beyond what I hoped when I started' (NST8). Contrasting this, another new teacher talked about how 'there's really not much you can do when they reach year seven and can't read or write, they don't give a toss about school and would rather be down the river' (NST1). Expressing a sense of helplessness, he further mentioned things like 'we get into trouble if we make too much of an issue' (NST1) and 'it's hopeless but you can't let it get you down, you've just got to do your time' (NST1). In these excerpts, and more generally in the research, the references to contextual factors for those teachers using negative language tended towards limitations that made teaching difficult. While teachers who used more positive language also tended to note contextual factors as limitations, they were also able to connect their teaching to their context and find opportunities within their challenges, as in the example of NST1 above. Notably here the teachers that used context in this negative manner were also the teachers who were most critical of 'the state of education' and recent reforms, whilst also using language which begins to suggest a separation between teaching (pedagogy) and what is taught (the written curriculum). Whereas those that used more positive language kept pedagogy and curriculum in close relation and spoke of the ways in which they use context as an opportunity to engage students. This separation between teaching and what is taught mirrors the separation of curriculum and pedagogy in dominant education reforms, such as the situation in many jurisdictions where a mandated curriculum focused upon content to be covered sits alongside, but separate to, jurisdictional models of effective pedagogy, or nationally an Australian Curriculum distinct from Professional Standards of Teaching.

In curriculum terms, the group of teachers that were place-conscious tended to see the formal curriculum as a guide they could manipulate and creatively interpret, whereas the more bureaucratic saw it as a guide to follow. In terms of history teaching, this generally resulted in either an approach where local history was used as a hook to learning and the basis through which the rest of the curriculum was taught, or as a subsequent example to the history that 'matters'. This is significant for valuing place as when the local is used and valued it is effectively written into history for the students and the students subtly told that they matter, as does their community. For example collaborating with local Aboriginal elders to co-teach significant events or using records of local servicemen, many related to the students, as the window through which to teach early twentieth century history. In both these approaches, the students' town is valued and seen as significant, connected to and actively involved in other important events. However, when the local is used as an example to merely illustrate global events, such as when early twentieth century history is taught from the perspective of European conflict and the local an afterthought of 'now let's look at people who came from here to fight', it is positioned as at the behest of larger forces and written out of history. Related to Somerville et al's (2012) study of new teachers learning about place and community, these teachers either saw their community as a valuable learning resource to be integrated into their teaching or as an example to be addressed.

It's not as simple as saying that those teachers who locate their practice in place suggest a more positive self-efficacy than those who do not. Instead the mediating factor appears to be their perception of place and its relationship to the curriculum. However, there is also a complicated further interrelationship between this place-consciousness and the teachers' attitude towards students. For example the following two excerpts show a distinctly different attitude towards students and place; however as it is unclear which causes the other all that can safely be assumed at this point is that they are related and impact upon teacher self-efficacy. In the excerpt, '*the kids just aren't interested, they can walk out of here once they turn 16 into an unskilled job in the mine earning more than their teachers*' (EXP 3), there is no cultural superiority or a view that an educated person is inherently better than one who leaves school early, instead there is genuine concern and frustration at short sighted policies. The participant went on to say:

but what happens when the boom busts, or new technology, or those driverless trucks come in? They're not going to have any skills or education to fall back on and that won't be good. We need to at least get their literacy up so they stay safe down there and have options in ten years time' (EXP 3).

Clearly this teacher is concerned about the students' futures and determined to do something for them. Contrasting this attitude is a new teacher who says:

seriously they just don't care, all they want to do is go piggin' and shoot stuff. They'll do some farm work or the dole, grow dope perhaps. What can ya do? Just make the most of it and try to at least give them something (NST 7).

Here there is a degree of resignation and hopelessness, both for what the teacher can achieve and a somewhat negative attitude towards the students and their culture.

Compared to NST7, another new teacher in a similar context took a very different stance to similar challenges:

wow what a culture shock, I didn't know anything about hunting, piggin' they call it, or shooting or that sort of thing. So I got the kids to tell me about it in class and we went on an excursion to some of their favourite spots. Then we looked at the history of farming and its impact on the environment, the environmental movement and the role of the shooters party in parliament. The kids did some great work, it was really fun and I learnt heaps. We did meet the syllabus in history and geography as well' (NST 10).

Here the teacher sees the students, and the local environment, as a resource and has an inherently positive outlook to the students and their culture. She recognizes and uses their funds of knowledge (Moll et al, 1992) and not in any relativistic or tokenistic form. It is genuinely linked to topics in the history and geography courses in NSW that she teaches in an integrated and authentic fashion linked to their environment.

This example illustrates how a place-conscious curriculum can use the students' community and local environment to build towards broader topics in the curriculum. It also illustrates the attributes of authentic learning outlined by Hayes et al. (2006) in that the learning is genuine, deep, structured, and gives value to cultures otherwise marginalized. There is an important subtle contrast here to a place-based approach that stays local and parochial. Take for example:

I get the kids to look at the (early pioneer of the town), there's a plaque to him on the old building in the main street. It's important for them to know who the important people in their town are, I guess it gives them a sense of place. (EXP1)

This activity is isolated and self-contained. The purpose is to know an important local identity. However other identities and alternative narratives to Eurocentric viewpoints are not ventured, nor is the activity placed in the context of settlement, development or other trends or themes.

Implementing a place-conscious curriculum requires teachers to have a thorough understanding of the written, mandated, curriculum in order to ensure students can access the important and powerful cultural knowledge it embodies. Besides totally reforming the curriculum, ensuring students have access to and can use powerful knowledge is an important outcome of the educational endeavor and if not addressed leaves students perpetually positioned outside the domains of power (Connell, 1993). Teachers need to be able to negotiate the complex territory of performance and expectations, of themselves and their students, whilst also facilitating student learning. It is here that a knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy as promoted in the neoliberal reform discourse is important, as well as an understanding that curriculum is much more than the content contained in a centralized curriculum. This tension is illustrated by concerns that:

in the end they sit the same test as everyone else, they've gotta be able to say it in a way the marker understands, there's no point using an example that makes sense to them but the marker doesn't understand so it's a fine balance (EXP4).

To understand this implication fully, it is important to recognize that the majority of markers for standardized tests in NSW come from metropolitan areas or locations that can access marking centers in major regional cities. Thus the vast majority of markers are metropolitan. In negotiating this tension, the teacher needs to be able to connect with students, as argued best done through a curriculum responsive to place, whilst also providing access to other constructions of knowledge. The separation of curriculum and pedagogy actively hinders such an approach, and as such, works to keep rural students on the periphery of educational achievement.

As Ball (2003) describes, the accountability regimes that surround teachers also exert significant pressure on their identities, and also I argue their ability to develop a place-conscious curriculum. I

have already mentioned some of the respondents' concerns about pedagogy models (here the NSW Quality Teaching Model, 2003) and their applicability in some of the contexts that participants are working in. However, rather than direct relevance it may be more a matter of how such models are used and the view of place employed in their use. As a general model it implies a necessity to situate and interpret its use in context, as one expert working in professional learning expressed: *'you can't understand quality teaching until you understand the context'* (XPT8). As can be seen in the following excerpt, how the place is imagined has a significant influence on how the model is used and interpreted, and therefore a strong influence on how teachers feel valued and supported to situate their practice:

we've got this new head teacher from the city who is running around measuring us all against the QT framework to 'improve quality', yet their class is chaos as the kids just see him as a blow in from the city, it's frustrating because he wants us to be like his former north shore HS, but hello this isn't the north shore of Sydney. (NST8)

Clearly here the imagined place of the Head Teacher and the teacher are different, and as such the application of the model and determination of the teachers' quality a point of significant conflict.

Similar to the Quality Teaching model, the same expert argued that another avenue of accountability, The Professional Teaching Standards (NSWIOT, 2004), need to be considered in context:

it's the same as the Quality Teaching Model, you've got to know the context, the school the community, otherwise you really can't use them properly as the basis of a conversation. (XPT8).

In addition to the explicit reference to 'context' this expert's orientation to using the standards as the basis of 'conversation' reinforces the importance of subjectivity, and consequently a place-consciousness, in effective professional learning. Whether such an approach is widely used and valued is questioned by a new teacher who sates:

know their students and how they learn is one of the elements – but we all learn in relationship to our environment and experiences, but if I put that in it contradicts what 'they' say about what is important in learning (NSW 8).

Notably here the teacher evokes the image of an imaged 'they' overseeing education and the determination of their effectiveness as a teacher. Such a statement also indicates an acceptance of the power and pervasiveness of a cosmopolitan view of education against which teachers in rural schools constantly struggle.

CONCLUSION

A study of this sort, based on the evidence of a few interviews, cannot claim to definitively determine what an authentic place-conscious curriculum is and the relationship this has to teacher self-efficacy. Instead it can indicate some points of tensions and identify contradictions and challenges to be explored separately and in greater detail. Bearing such limitations in mind, this paper suggests that teachers who reinterpret the curriculum and situate their pedagogy in the places they work are better placed to meet the educational needs of their students and their own professional goals. However, it also recognises that such an approach is difficult in the present performative context of a national curriculum, state sponsored pedagogy models, national professional standards, and public reporting and accountability systems which all value cosmopolitan ways of being. In the end, an authentic rural pedagogy and curriculum is constructed as fundamental to teacher satisfaction and well-being, and perhaps an important component of rural school staffing in limiting professional dissatisfaction and subsequent teacher turnover.

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